

Occasional Address

Royal Exhibition Building, Thursday 12 December 2019

Nicole Brown

Structural Engineer

University of Melbourne Graduate, 2016

Distinguished guests, graduands, family and friends; three years ago, I was sitting in this very building, about to graduate with a Master of Engineering (structural). I remember feeling nervous, relieved, excited, and proud. It was a whirlwind of emotions and at the time, very overwhelming. As you leave university, I wish I could say that life settles down, but it is only beginning.

The first three years of my career have not been as I expected. After graduation, I was joining a company where I had been working since I was 18; after six years, it was a familiar and safe environment. However, within the first six months of starting full time, things completely changed. The company ownership changed, there were several changes to management and my role within the team changed from one of a technical focus, to one of a management focus. The changes were quite difficult to process, and I was under a significant amount of pressure daily. At first, I felt frustrated, disillusioned and even a little angry about the situation; however, I realised that I had a choice. And I chose to look at the changes as an opportunity to expand my skill-set. As a result, I gained extremely valuable project management, resourcing and construction management experience; skills that will hold me in good stead as I progress through my career.

Workplace changes are inevitable, and it is our ability to see other perspectives and be resilient in the face of these challenges, which will enable us to succeed.

Following the changes to my role in my workplace, I took some time to reflect on where I was in my career and where I wanted to take my career. Through speaking with mentors, family and friends, I was able to process how I was feeling and why I was feeling that way. It also helped clarify what changes I needed to make in my own life to direct my career the way I wanted to go. I decided that what I wanted was to experience working in a larger company, a global company if possible, with a strong technical focus. I found, and took, that opportunity about six months ago and have been thoroughly enjoyed the new challenges which have stemmed from this career change.

With the support of friends and family, through reflecting on where I was and where I wanted to go, I was able to make the right decision. Not an easy decision, but the right decision for me, at the right time.

Whether faced with challenges or successes, ensure to take the time to reflect on how you are feeling and where you are in your life; and consider where you are going and how you are going to get there.

It is also important to consider how activities outside your work life shape who you are. Outside of work, I have always looked for opportunities to develop new skills, expand my network, grow my understanding of the world and be able to help others in meaningful ways.

Whilst at university, I was involved in Robogals, leading a global movement to encourage more women to consider engineering as a career.

Since finishing university, I have chosen to volunteer with groups within the workplace, with Engineers Australia, and with a program called the Queens Young Leaders; all of which created opportunities beyond my wildest dreams; opportunities to work with amazing engineers, meet inspirational young leaders and even being invited to Buckingham Palace to meet Her Majesty the Queen.

Life is what you make of it. The world is full of possibilities and opportunities: some opportunities are presented to you, but more often than not, you have to create your own opportunities.

And as Engineers, we have the opportunity to make a difference. We have a unique skill-set that is sought after in a wide range of industries. The way we are trained enables us to think systematically and to be innovators, to be designers, to be entrepreneurs. And I have seen many of my friends and peers, driven by the challenges facing our world, redefining what it means to be a 'typical' Engineer. Creating their own opportunities to work in fields they are passionate about. Engineering can, and will, take you places.

Today, as you graduate, just as I did three years ago, embrace all the emotions of the day: relief that you have finally finished university, excitement to the opportunities ahead, fear as to the unknown and pride as to what you have achieved so far.

Today, for the very first time, you will be able to proudly stand up and say, "I am an Engineer".

And as an Engineer and a Graduate of the University of Melbourne, stand tall in the face of challenges, be resilient, continue to reflect on where you are and where you are going, seek out and create your own opportunities, and above all, enjoy the amazing world that Engineering has to offer.

Vice-Chancellor's Introduction

Today the University welcomes Nicole Brown as guest speaker. Nicole is a graduate of the University of Melbourne, completing a Bachelor of Science and then the degree of Master of Engineering (Structural) in 2016. She is now working at AECOM as a Structural Engineer. Nicole is a strong advocate for encouraging and empowering young people, in particular women, to consider engineering as a career.

During her studies, Nicole held the position of CEO of Robogals Global, leading the growth of the organisation into 33 cities around the world; and expanding Robogals' impact, reaching over 65,000 young women to inspire them about engineering. For her work with Robogals,

Nicole was recognised as a Queens Young Leader in 2015; one of only 128 in the world. Nicole continues to promote the profession of engineering through various speaking engagements and volunteering on the Young Engineers Australia National Committee.

Please join me in welcoming Nicole Brown.